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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Cameroon

Addendum

Information received from Cameroon on follow-up to the concluding observations*

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Note: The present document is being circulated in English, French and Spanish only.
* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

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1. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women formulated its concluding observations having considered the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Cameroon at its thirty-third session, held on 12 February 2014, and after noting areas of satisfaction and matters of concerns. The Committee, inter alia, requested the party to provide, within two years, written information on the steps undertaken to implement the recommendations contained in paragraphs 17 and 19 of its concluding observations.

2. By a note verbale dated 10 August 2016, the Rapporteur on follow-up to the concluding observations of the Committee requested the Government of Cameroon to transmit, without delay, the report on implementation of the above recommendations.

3. The present follow-up report contains an account of the steps taken by the State party to give effect to the Committee's recommendations, for the period from February 2014 to September 2016. It was developed through a participatory approach involving government agencies, civil society organizations and technical State partners.

4. This follow-up report includes information on issues raised in the observations in paragraph 17 (a) and specific information on violence against women.

Paragraph 17

Response from the Government of Cameroon

The comprehensive strategy

5. Cameroon has a comprehensive strategy for combating stereotypes, harmful practices and discrimination against women. It focuses on prevention, care and institutional development. Reference frameworks have been developed to oversee the actions arising from these strategic guidelines, namely: the national plan of action for the promotion and protection of human rights; the multisectoral action plan for the implementation of national gender policy; the action plan to combat female genital mutilation; and the national strategy to combat gender-based violence.

On prevention:

- The dissemination of the above-mentioned strategic frameworks has reached 11 million 500,000 people since March 2014 in the 10 regions, including people living in rural areas (57.7 per cent of the population of Cameroon).
- Two awareness-raising and advocacy sessions have been organized for the National Assembly and the Senate, coupled with broad outreach and sectoral and social ownership of legal instruments for the protection of the rights of women, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights of 1966, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women of 1993 and the Francophone Declaration on Violence against Women. As a result, the Government and Parliament have laid the foundations for fruitful collaboration with a view to concerted local action for the promotion and protection of the rights of women and the elimination of discrimination against this social category.
- Seventy five capacity-building sessions have been organized for community leaders and the members of networks of women's and men's associations in

the 10 regions, in order to ensure effective cooperation between the Government and civil society organizations, as part of efforts to combat sociocultural practices that are harmful to the well-being of women and girls. These training sessions were held for a total of 313,000 people in Yaoundé, Monatélé, Mbalmayo and Mfou (central region); Bertoua, Batouri, Yokadouma, Ndélélé, Gado Badzeré, Abong Mbang and Doumé (eastern region); Ebolowa, Ambam and Sangmelima (southern region); Ngaoundéré and Meiganga (Adamoua region); Maroua, Mora, Mokolo, Moulyouday and Kousseri (far northern region); Doualam Nkongsamba and Edéa (coastal region); Mamfé and Kumba (north-western region); Buea and Limbe (south-western region); Bafoussam (western region); and Garoua (northern region).

- The global campaign known as "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence" and the "zero tolerance for female genital mutilation" campaign are organized annually and include educational talks, radio broadcasts in local languages, the distribution of leaflets, and the holding of conferences, debates and socio-legal clinics.

- Programmes targeting gender-based discrimination and women's rights are broadcast in local languages on community radio stations to reach men and women without an education. Such is the case for Canal Haoussa of the briqueterie neighbourhood and Télé Sahel of the Etoudi neighbourhood in Yaoundé. These broadcasts raise awareness about enrolling girls in school and combating degrading widowhood rites and other cultural practices unfavourable to the well-being of women and girls, such as female genital mutilation and early and/or forced marriage.

- A space for dialogue, advocacy and awareness-raising known as "Café Genre" has been established in collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). It provides a platform for discussing various aspects related to promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls, and engaging in concerted efforts to find solutions.

- Five hundred sessions of socio-legal clinics have been organized with an emphasis on ownership of legal texts and good practices, the dissemination of information on remedies, and outreach to men and communities about legislation.

- One hundred and fifty police officers have been trained to care for survivors of gender-based violence in humanitarian settings in the eastern region and in Adamaoua region. This operation is intended to continue and be extended to the judiciary. In addition, some 30 representatives of government agencies and civil society have been trained to combat gender-based violence in humanitarian settings on the basis of the relevant guidelines issued by the United Nations.

- The promotion of the establishment of associations for men engaged in the defence of women's rights is under way. This began with schools for husbands ("écoles de maris"), which are learning facilities where men learn to promote and respect the rights of women within households. The first pilot projects began in Batouri in the eastern region. On 11 August 2016, under the august patronage of the Head of State, His Excellency Paul Biya, and effectively steered by the Prime Minister and Head of Government, the State party launched the "HeForShe" campaign nationally, as part of the global campaign for the inclusion of men in this movement. On that occasion, the members of the Government and men of high social standing solemnly undertook to combat discrimination and violence against women, including gender stereotypes, forced and/or early marriage and degrading widowhood rites.

Currently 683 men have registered on the online platform of this campaign, which aims to reach two million men by the end of 2016.

- The International Day of the Girl Child is organized every year. It helps to sensitize communities about the need to send girls to school and abandon practices such as forced and/or early marriage.
- Studies are being conducted in order to better identify the causes of persistent harmful practices against women. One example is a 2015 study in Akwaya, a town in the south-western region, on the phenomenon of "Money Woman".
- A total of 114,350 women have been trained in information and communications technology: 103,350 as part of an operation to train 100,000 women by 2012 and 11,000 under an operation to train one million youth and women by 2035. This operation is aimed at reducing disparities between men and women in the area of new information and communications technologies as a key tool for political, economic, social and cultural information.

On care:

- A total of 11,682 survivors of gender-based violence were cared for in reception centres from 2015 to 2016.
- Counselling services and socio-legal clinics helped 12,692 women in distress.
- One hundred and fifty girls from poor families wishing to continue their studies received vacation benefits in 2015-2016. The Ministry for the Advancement of Women and the Family and other government departments and agencies provide the same service to several hundreds of students of both sexes. This is a practice adopted by the Government to reduce the gap between girls and boys in education.

Combating economic and employment discrimination has not been overlooked. The following should be noted:

- The granting of subsidies to 4,561 women's groups.
- Information technology capacity-building at 11 centres for the advancement of women and the family, enabling computer equipment and solar panels to be installed in the context of the implementation of the Central African Backbone project, funded by the African Development Bank.

As regards institutional development, the following should be noted:

- The establishment of gender clubs, gender desks and call centres in schools and universities, police stations and centres for the advancement of women and the family. Their purpose is to popularize gender in the institutions concerned, to track cases of violations of the rights of women and girls, including gender-based violence, and to conduct a diligent search for solutions, in collaboration with the competent authorities.
- Twelve new centres for the advancement of women and the family have been built. These are centres of local training, learning and coaching for women which also provide counselling and outreach services to communities on women's rights.
- The establishment of community radio stations.
- The establishment of a network of communications professionals in 2014. This conducts awareness-raising activities on the rights of women.

- Thirty new civil society organizations working to combat gender-based violence have emerged.
- The establishment of a subgroup to combat gender-based violence in humanitarian settings.

Regarding measures against forced or early marriages and criminalizing perpetrators of female genital mutilation, breast ironing and discriminatory widowhood rites:

6. The State party has satisfied this requirement of the Committee. Article 277-1 of the new Penal Code stipulates:

> (1) Whoever mutilates the genital organ of a person, by any means whatsoever, shall be punished with the penalties provided for in article 277 above.
>
> (2) The penalty shall be imprisonment for life where:
>
> (a) The offender habitually carried out such practice or does so for commercial purposes;
>
> (b) It leads to the death of the victim.
>
> (3) The court may also impose the forfeitures provided for in articles 19 and 30 of this Code.
>
> (4) The provisions of subparagraphs 1 and 2 above shall not apply where the acts are performed by an authorized person and are justified by the need to save the victim's life.

7. It should be recalled that article 277, referred to above, deals with grievous harm and stipulates: "Whoever permanently deprives another of the use of the whole or of any part of any member, organ or sense shall be punished with imprisonment for a period of 10 to 20 years."

8. Breast ironing is punished as an offence relating to the prevention of growth of an organ, pursuant to article 277-2, which stipulates: "Whoever, in any manner whatsoever, interferes with an organ in order to inhibit its normal growth shall be punished with imprisonment for a period from six months to five years and/or with a fine of 100,000 to one million francs.

9. Forced marriage is also punishable under article 356 of the Penal Code, which states:

> (1) Whoever compels anyone to marry shall be punished with imprisonment for a period of five to ten years and with a fine of 25,000 to 1 million francs.
>
> (2) Where the victim is under the age of 18, the punishment may not be less than two years' imprisonment, whatever the mitigating circumstances.
>
> (3) Whoever gives in marriage a boy or girl under the age of 18 shall be punished as provided for in subparagraphs 1 and 2 above.
>
> (4) Upon conviction, the court may deprive the offender of parental power and disqualify him from being the guardian or curator of any person for the period stipulated in article 31(4) of this Code.

10. As a result of this judicial review of the legality of marriages in general and the age of marriage in particular, the courts monitor compliance with the legal age. The new Penal Code has harmonized the legal age for girls and boys by establishing it at 18 years, whereas before girls could marry at 15 years.

11. The new Penal Code has also taken into account the situation of widows by criminalizing acts that might affect their rights. Accordingly, deprivation of a survivor's pension and expulsion from the marital home are now offences under articles 180-1 and 358-1. In this regard, article 180-1 reads: "Whoever deprives a surviving spouse or orphans from benefiting from the survivor's pension to which they are entitled shall be punished as provided for in article 180 (1) above."

12. For its part, article 358-1 states that: "A spouse who, outside of judicial proceedings and without a valid reason, evicts the other spouse from the marital home, shall be punished with imprisonment for a period of three months to one year and with a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 francs". The penalty is imprisonment from two to five years if the expulsion is accompanied by physical or psychological violence, confiscation or destruction of the personal effects of the victim, or if the eviction is committed by a person other than the spouse. The latter case will protect widows from stigmatization and from being dispossessed of their deceased spouses' property by his entourage.

13. Moreover, where widowhood rites violate the physical integrity of victims, perpetrators are prosecuted on the basis of offences against the physical integrity of the human person, such as bodily harm, grievous bodily harm, simple injuries and light injuries, as provided for and punished by articles 74, 277, 279, 280 and 281 of the Penal Code.

14. The new Penal Code goes further:

- By standardizing the treatment of adultery among men and women (article 361).
- By punishing abuse in respect of dowries, refusal to pay maintenance, marriage to a rape victim, rape itself, sexual harassment, violence against pregnant women, etc.

The prosecution and conviction of those who kidnap children, especially young girls, for the sale of organs or magic/religious practices

15. The State party condemns in the strongest terms these heinous acts. Cases brought to the attention of the Government are investigated and charges are brought when the investigations are conclusive. In that connection, following repeated cases of kidnapping and subsequent killings in the Mimboman district in 2014, 10 alleged perpetrators were arrested and charged by the Mfoundi High Court, which issued a partial dismissal and remittal order on 30 July 2014. That ruling was quashed by the Review Chamber of the Central Court of Appeal, resulting in the remittal of all of the accused before the court for judgment following Judgment No. 04/CI of 5 March 2015. Currently two cases of abduction of children for magic/religious practices are pending before the Dschang High Court, in the western region of the country.

Paragraph 19

Response from the Government of Cameroon

(a) Effective implementation of the national strategy to combat violence against women

16. The information provided in connection with paragraph 17 above shows the implementation of the national strategy to be effective and ongoing. This will undoubtedly require additional resources and increased support of partners, taking into account the new constraints caused by humanitarian crisis, following political and military conflicts in neighbouring States and terrorists outrages resulting in the

displacement of many families, particularly women and girls. The recent signature, with the United Nations system, of a joint programme for accelerating the prevention of gender-based violence and the provision of holistic care for survivors in the most affected areas of Cameroon will help to consolidate ongoing efforts and better address new forms of gender-based violence observed in refugee camps and within households and communities.

(b) Effective investigations of all cases of violence against women and the prosecution and punishment of perpetrators

17. The national legal framework allows investigations to be undertaken and prosecutions brought against the perpetrators of violence against women, including by means of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which establishes the rules of procedure. Accordingly, in 2015, sexual violence reported against women resulted in 258 prosecutions before the courts — 485 investigations were opened, resulting in 157 convictions — whereas in 2014, for the same offences, 84 prosecutions were brought before 54 courts. In addition, 35 women were victims of bodily harm, 252 were victims of simple injuries and 492 were victims of light injuries. These findings also led to prosecutions and convictions.

(c) Adoption of a comprehensive law on violence against women; and punishment for rape, sexual harassment at school and in the workplace and rape in the context of subsequent marriage

18. Cameroon has chosen not to adopt a specific law on gender-based violence, but to integrate all provisions criminalizing this scourge in the Penal Code, in order to avoid disparities and the proliferation of legislation.

19. Sexual harassment is punished by article 302-1, which states:

> Whoever abuses the authority of his position to harass another by giving orders, making threats, imposing constraints or exerting pressure in order obtain sexual favours shall be punished with imprisonment for a period of six months to one year and with a fine of 100,000 to one million francs.
>
> (2) The penalty shall be imprisonment for one to three years where the victim is a minor.
>
> (3) The penalty shall be imprisonment of three to five years where if the offender is in charge of the education of the victim.

20. Lastly, subsequent marriage is no longer exempt from prosecution in the case of rape, pursuant to article 297 of the Penal Code. In accordance with this article marriage freely consented between the offender and the victim, even where she is over puberty at the time of commission of the offences provided for in articles 295 and 296 above, shall have no effect on prosecution and conviction.

(e) Assistance to victims of gender-based violence, including medical and psychological support, as well as shelter, counselling and rehabilitation services, throughout the territory of the State party

21. Cameroon has established shelters and care centres for women in distress and/or victims of violence in Douala (coastal region), Yaoundé (central region), Bertoua (eastern region), and Maroua, Mora and Mokolo (far northern region). These are multipurpose centres that provide all the services referred to by the Committee in subparagraph (e). Some centres have a telephone line to facilitate reporting and referrals. These units provide comprehensive care (reception, medical referrals, legal and judicial support, economic support, etc.).

(f) Removal of the policy on "indecent dressing"

22. Cameroon has never adopted legislation prohibiting any form of dress. The Government has conducted a youth education campaign in the context of disseminating the legal provisions concerning private indecency under article 295 of the Penal Code. The campaign was primarily a measure to protect young people in general, and girls in particular, against rape. No girl or boy has been prosecuted, threatened with prosecution or convicted because of their attire.

(g) Training for the police and other law enforcement officials, health and social workers, and the judiciary on the application of legal provisions aimed at combating violence against women

23. Cameroon is following up on this guidance. The first wave of trained police officers numbered 150, as described in previous responses. A new wave of training is planned. This is intended for 250 police officers in the far northern region and it will involve the judiciary.

24. The Government is pursuing this action by disseminating the provisions of the new Penal Code relating to women's rights. Hence, on 28 July 2016, a session was held to promote ownership of this important law not only among law enforcement, but also among health personnel, the judiciary, members of parliament, academics, teachers, community leaders, traditional and political authorities and religious ministers. This activity, which took place at Yaoundé Cercle Municipal with the technical support of UN-Women, continues in the regions; the first time it was repeated was on 18 August 2016 in Monatélé (central region). It is being replicated in the regional delegations of the Ministry for the Advancement of Women and the Family in the 10 regions.

25. The Government of Cameroon reiterates its determination to implement the relevant provisions of the Convention and to continue the implementation of the guidelines of the international community, of which it is a member, for the emergence of a humane society where women, men, girls and boys enjoy the same rights and contribute to the march of history, while drawing the same benefits from development processes in a world free of discrimination and exclusion.

26. It remains true that States must contend with real challenges of how to balance policies for gender promotion with the resources available for their financing and while taking national specificities into account in their actions.